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WAR INFORMATION SERIES

No. 15 March, 1918

WHY AMERICA FIGHTS GERMANY

(CANTONMENT EDITION)

BY

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U.S.

Issued by

THE COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC INFORMATION

WASHINGTON, D. C.

Collected set.

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EXECUTIVE ORDER.

I hereby create a Committee on Public Information, to be composed of the Secretary of State, the Secretary of War, the Secretary of the Navy, and a civilian who shall be charged with the executive direction of the committee.

As civilian chairman of the committee I appoint Mr. George Creel.

The Secretary of State, the Secretary of War, and the Secretary of the Navy are authorized each to detail an officer or officers to the work of the committee.

WOODROW WILSON.

April 24, 1917.

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WHY AMERICA FIGHTS GERMANY

America is a peaceable nation. We believe in the principle of "live and let live." We respect other nations' rights, wish them prosperity, and envy them nothing. We have vast territory and undeveloped resources, enough to occupy our minds and hands for generations without meddling with other people's concerns. We believe that the peace and happiness of mankind will be promoted by self-government for all, by allowing the population of each civilized country to govern itself. Through almost our whole history we have stood for democracy and peace. We have protected China from robbery and war on the part of more greedy nations, and have stood the strongest friend of the new Chinese republic. In 1896 we stood the friend of Venezuela in her controversy with Great Britain, and prevented war. For years we have even allowed our own citizens to be wronged in Mexico rather than make war on our neighbor republic. Consequently, we are now trusted as the big brother of all the republics in the New World. When we departed from our peaceful policy in 1898, and made war on Spain, it was in order to stop intolerable oppression at our very door, in Cuba. We then gave and have guarded the independence of Cuba, and only took the Philippine Islands in order to save them from falling to some less disinterested nation, and in order to educate their people for independence later. Thus we have always worked for peace, and for the justice to all which is the only sure way to maintain peace.

We are a peaceable nation

Well, then, why did we enter the Great European War? Why was it our affair? If we love peace, why do we make war? Did we drift in without knowing what we were doing, did we get in by some kind of "fluke"? **We are in the war because we had to go in unless we were entirely blind to our own honor and safety, and to the future happiness of the whole world.**

Then why do we fight?

Germany has attacked us. What finally forced us into the war was the unlimited submarine warfare started by Germany on the 1st of February, 1917. Before this, many American ships had been sunk by German submarines, and hundreds of American lives had been lost on these and other ships. This was contrary to all humanity and even all law. Merchant ships may be turned

Germany makes war on us

back from blockaded ports, but cannot legally be sunk without mercy. The most horrible outrage was the torpedoing of the unarmed British ship *Lusitania*, in May, 1915, when 1154 lives were lost, 114 being American. In May, 1916, the German Government had agreed that this sort of thing should not go on. Therefore in February, 1917, the German Government simply broke its word and defied us. It was announced that any ships whatever, American or of any other nation, found anywhere within enormous areas of the free Atlantic west and north of Europe and in the Mediterranean, would be sunk without warning and without mercy to their crews and passengers. Germany was as bad as her word: she proceeded to sink American and other ships, regardless of the fate of those aboard, among whom many Americans perished. **Every such act of Germany was an act of war against us.** If we put up with such savagery, it would mean establishing permanently the right of submarines in war-time to sink merchant ships and drown innocent people. It would mean that mercy and humanity are to have no control over the acts of nations.

Fight or be despised

Suppose your neighbor X dislikes your neighbor A. Suppose he announces that if he sees you on the steps of A's house, or even walking on the public sidewalk near it, he will kill you, and proves his seriousness by shooting you through the arm with a revolver. Will you go home and say indulgently, that "it is no affair of yours, that you are a lover of peace, and will leave them to settle their own quarrels"? Or will you send for the police; or else, if you are in a thinly settled region, will you not yourself restrain and punish the outlaw X? Even supposing you had thought earlier that there was as much to be said on X's side of the quarrel as on A's, would not X's criminal and foolish conduct throw you over to A's side? Because we believe in "live and let live," we do not believe in *die and let die*. No nation of vigorous men and women could put up with such intolerable outrages. We fought the War of 1812 for less, we fought the Spanish War of 1898 for much less. **If we had not fought Germany after her false and brutal conduct, we should have been despised by all the world, including the Germans.**

Her barbarities outraged us

So America had far more immediate provocation than she needed to make her an enemy of the German Government. But there were deeper and wider reasons yet. You have reason enough to fight a man if he attacks you, but if you have long known that he is a bad and dangerous man, you have still more reason to master him. The overwhelming majority of Americans had been against Germany from the very outbreak of the war in August, 1914. We

knew that Germany and Austria desired the war, and forced it on their unwilling opponents, the Allies. Our sense of humanity, justice, and chivalry was horrified by the German invasion of Belgium, a weak and innocent nation which stood in the road which the German armies wished to take into France. We were horrified still more by their conduct in Belgium—by their needless destruction of precious things, by their vile and filthy treatment of the Belgians, by their robberies, by their numberless murders. A German soldier fell off his bicycle and his gun went off; he declared he had been shot at, and all the inhabitants of the village were burned to death in their homes. Feeble old Belgian priests were forced to walk in front of the marching German armies as screens, so that if the Belgians fired they might kill the priests first. Babies were stabbed with bayonets. Belgians were carried off into Germany and forced to work for the German armies. There is a picture by a Dutch artist of a poor old Belgian making a shell; the dreadful expression in his face tells us he is thinking, "Perhaps this will kill my son." German seamen from a submarine got into the lifeboat of a ship sunk far from land, emptied the fresh-water casks, filled them with salt-water, and even threw overboard the crew's little packages, done up in bandanna handkerchiefs, of little personal belongings which the poor fellows wanted to save. The crew of another ship which was torpedoed were put on the deck of the submarine, which then dived and left them to drown. **Whole books have been written about these horrors, against all law and humanity, and yet half of them have not been recorded.** The more decent German soldiers have confessed and deplored them, some have even gone crazy, even killed themselves, it is said, rather than commit them. And we know that many or most of them were not the acts of uncontrolled brutes who chanced to be in the German army; **they were ordered in cold blood by the authorities.** That is the difference between this war and most wars. Indignation at such barbarities brought hundreds of generous-hearted young Americans to fight on the Allies' side long before the American nation entered the war.

All trust undermined

We had also formed a deep distrust of the German Government's honor and word. How could we help it, when the Chancellor of the Empire brushed aside the solemn treaty which was to have safeguarded Belgium, and called it in so many words a mere "scrap of paper"? From month to month we learned more and more of the treachery of the German Government. Through its agents, even through the official diplomats in its embassy at Washington, it committed acts of intrigue and treachery against us within our own country, while it was professing to be our

friend. Of such cases twenty-one were listed by our House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs at the time when we declared war. Among these acts were placing bombs on ships sailing from American ports; producing strikes and blowing up factories in the United States; plotting in this neutral country to blow up bridges, tunnels, and factories in Canada; and stirring up anti-American feeling and generally promoting disorder in the unhappy country of Mexico. Thus she attacked our honor and well-being while at peace with us. **The net of German intrigue has encompassed the world.** Germany's diplomats have been at their treacherous work in the Argentine republic. Worst of all, we know now—she herself admitted when found out—that she tried to induce Mexico and Japan to make war on us. She kindly gave Mexico permission to annex Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona! And she thought the honorable Japanese as contemptible as herself, and that they might be led to desert their Allies in the present war, and help Germany by attacking us, their friends. How is the world to live with a nation which must be utterly distrusted? The most precious thing in the world, civilization, is built on humaneness and trust. Is it no concern of ours that a powerful and aggressive nation marches over the earth crushing them to fragments as it goes?

Brutalities based on precept

In these three or four years of war the American people have learned a great deal about the German Government and its principles. It is this, far more than any particular event, which has made the American people determined to see this war through till the German Government is crushed or reformed. Suppose you learned that your neighbor X, whom we spoke of, was in the habit of boasting to his intimates that he had no principles except to get ahead himself, that others have no rights, and that he should never hesitate to kill anyone who interfered with him; should you not feel that the place for him was the penitentiary or the insane asylum? We have learned that **the Germans' conduct all through the war is the direct consequence of their organization and their principles.** From all kinds of books and speeches, by their Emperor, their public men, their thinkers, we have found that they will stop at nothing, absolutely at nothing, which stands in the way of exalting Germany. They will commit needless crimes and cruelties, murdering children, destroying ancient art, because they believe this will break the spirit of their enemies and make them submit through fear. It does not work that way; but this proves the German authorities not to be less criminal, simply more foolish. Their Kaiser himself said to his troops when they set out for China in 1900:

> "No mercy will be shown! No prisoners will be taken! As the Huns, under King Attila, made a name for themselves, which is still mighty in traditions and legends today, may the name of German be so fixed in China by your deeds, that no Chinese shall ever again dare even to look at a German askance. . . . Open the way for *Kultur* once for all."

The rest of the world for fifteen hundred years has regarded the Huns with horror as pitiless savages, but the German Kaiser admires them! A more humane German who denounced the outrages of the German soldiers in China was sentenced to prison for three months. The greatest of German statesmen, Bismarck, stated this in 1871 as the proper treatment of the people (not the army) in an enemy country:

> "We shall shoot, hang, and burn. After that has happened a few times, the inhabitants will finally come to their senses."

In the present war this has been done not a few but innumerable times; their enemies have not given way only because other peoples are not the base cowards which the Germans think they are. A German preacher has said this in a public address:

> "Whoever cannot prevail upon himself to approve from the bottom of his heart the sinking of the *Lusitania*, whoever cannot conquer his sense of the gigantic cruelty to unnumbered perfectly innocent victims, . . . and give himself up to honest delight at this victorious exploit of German defensive power—him we judge to be no true German."

If this is the way to be a "true German," who would wish to be one? From the Kaiser down, the Germans talk much of God being with them; but it is not the God of the New Testament, nor the God of the Hebrew prophets.

The "holiness" of war

What makes all this most dangerous to the world is that the Germans like and admire war. They are always ready to let loose such horrors. "War is the noblest and holiest expression of human activity." So says an influential paper which circulates among young boys and others. "The ideal of perpetual peace is not only impossible but immoral as well," says one of the greatest German writers of history. One of the most influential of German philosophers writes:

> "Ye shall love peace as a means to new wars, and the short peace better than the long."

Another eminent philosopher says:

"A State organized only for peace is really no State. A State is really manifest only in its preparation for war."

"The lessons of history thus confirm the view that wars which have been deliberately provoked by far-seeing statesmen have had the happiest results."

This is from a recent and very influential book by a German general. So **Germany not only makes war in the most savage and merciless way. She thinks war in itself a good thing, and desires it.**

All-Democracy vs. all-Despotism

Many things have become clearer to the world during the course of the war. From the first the cause of human rights and freedom was seen to be the cause of the peoples allied against Germany. But especially since the Russian Revolution of March, 1917, one of the greatest facts of the war is that **all-Democracy is now waging a supreme struggle against all-Despotism.** On the Allied side are the republic of France, the vast future republic of Russia, the democracies of Great Britain and Italy (kingdoms hardly more than in name), not to mention the other democracies of the world which are giving their blood or at least their encouragement. On the German side are the autocracies (with the sham of democracy)—the German, the Austrian, and the Turkish Empires. On which side does America belong? Can our ancient republic, which taught popular rule to the world, to France, England and Russia, stand by unmoved when all that we hold sacred is in danger? We in this country are so used to the word democracy that we do not always realize what it means. It means opportunity to every man for success. It means that every man with the necessary ability and character can rise from poverty to wealth and power, and that government will put no needless obstacle in his way, but will protect and aid him. Everyone knows that this has happened countless times in America. But if democracy is conquered in this war, the liberty of the individual man must be diminished that the nation as a whole may be defended from foreign autocracy. This is not a dream: it is a grim fact. **If democracy is conquered in this war, all free peoples must either submit to Germany's domination, or else give up a part of their democracy in order to resist her.**

Germany would dominate the world

The tide of man's history is all against autocracy. The great future is with us. But German autocracy is building dikes against the flood, and may hold it off for centuries, by keeping its subjects comfortable, by using the utmost help of science and efficient management, and by achieving a great world empire in the center of the Eastern Hemisphere. At this minute Ger-

many virtually controls Austria-Hungary, the Balkan States, and the Turkish Empire, which hate her but must do her will. That is why she is so eager for peace now. She still controls the route of the Bagdad railway, which will give far the quickest route to Asia and Africa. The spider that sits at Berlin can dart along the lines that lead over Europe, Asia and Africa, and dominate the Atlantic, Indian and Pacific Oceans. When the railroads are completed, Germany would have a vast commercial advantage in peace, and vast wealth and military and naval advantage in war. If it takes years for the democracies of the world to conquer her now, how will it be then?

German menace to America

Someone may think all of this none of our business. Someone may dislike German ideas, but still say, "Here we are away off across the Atlantic, in no danger from Germany. She will never dare attack us, she may turn the Old World upside-down, but she will let the New World alone." The answer to this is: **We must fight Germany in Europe that we may not have to fight her in America.** We are and have been for a long time in danger from Germany. The Kaiser only two or three years ago stated it to our ambassador with the insulting frankness of a bully. "He stood very close to me and talked very earnestly," says Mr. Gerard. "He showed, however, great bitterness against the United States and repeatedly said, 'America had better look out after this war'; and 'I shall stand no nonsense from America after the war.'" Germany desires colonies in South America, in Brazil, which our Monroe Doctrine would oblige us to defend. If she once got a foothold in America, there would be no end to her encroaching. She desires power in the Pacific, and has expected trouble with us there—which all but came during our Spanish War. She believes she can beat us, and would not hesitate to attack us. **Plans have all been formed, and printed, by men of military rank, for an invasion of America.** Every well-informed man knows that a war between Germany and the United States alone not only has long been possible, but might easily be fatal to us. We are a strong nation, but so are the Germans. They have two-thirds our population, and both in peace and war-time have a far larger and stronger army, and a larger and stronger fleet. These are cold facts. **We must fight Germany in Europe with help, that we may not have to fight her in America without help.**

Now let us picture what a sudden invasion of the United States by these Germans would mean; sudden, because their settled way is always to attack suddenly. First they set themselves to capture New York City. While their fleet blockades the harbor and shells the city and the forts from far at sea,

their troops land somewhere near and advance toward the city in order to cut its rail communications, starve it into surrender, and then plunder it. One body of from 50,000 to 100,000 men lands, let us suppose, at Barnegat Bay, N. J., and advances without meeting resistance, for the brave but small American army is scattered elsewhere. They pass through Lakewood, a station on the Central Railroad of New Jersey. They first demand wine for the officers and beer for the men. Angered to find that an American town does not contain large quantities of either, they pillage and burn the post-office and most of the hotels and stores. Then they demand $1,000,000 from the residents. One feeble old woman tries to conceal twenty dollars which she has been hoarding in her desk drawer; she is taken out and hanged (to save a cartridge). Some of the teachers in two district schools meet a fate which makes them envy her. The Catholic priest and Methodist minister are thrown into a pig-sty, while the German soldiers look on and laugh. Some of the officers quarter themselves in a handsome house on the edge of the town, insult the ladies of the family, and destroy and defile the contents of the house. By this time some of the soldiers have managed to get drunk; one of them discharges his gun accidentally, the cry goes up that the residents are firing on the troops, and then hell breaks loose. Robbery, murder and outrage run riot. Fifty leading citizens are lined up against the First National Bank building, and shot. Most of the town and the beautiful pine-woods are burned, and then the troops move on to treat New Brunswick in the same way—if they get there.

If the Germans land in New Jersey

This is not just a snappy story. It is not fancy. The general plan of campaign against America has been announced repeatedly by German military men. And **every horrible detail is just what the German troops have done in Belgium and France.** The same thing would happen at Plymouth or Gloucester in the advance on Boston; might happen at Michigan City, Indiana, in the advance on Chicago, at Council Bluffs on the way to Omaha. It is hard for an American to realize the danger. It has never happened before, because there has never before been such a menace as the German Empire of our day. You do not expect your house to burn down, but you insure it, especially if there have been many incendiary fires in your town. There has been far more danger of an invasion of America by Germany than of your house burning down; our insurance against this invasion is doing our level best to crush the present German Government now while the rest of the world too is determined to crush it.

It must never happen

Can we crush it? Yes, if we work and fight, all of us, soldiers and civilians, with heart and soul and both hands. The German

nation is not greater than the rest of the world, though just now it thinks it is. During the first part of the war they were superior in a military way, because the whole nation for fifty years and more had been organized first and foremost for war. Other nations did not want war, and had organized for peace. But does any red-blooded American doubt that if ever since the Rebellion we had thought and dreamed and worked for War, War, War, our armies would be better than the German? Six modern inventions have been conspicuous in the present war: the airplane, the submarine, the automobile, the wireless telegraph, the "tanks," the Zeppelin balloon. Of these the first two are American inventions; the automobile mainly French (partly German); the wireless telegraph is Italian; the "tanks" English. The only one of the six which has conspicuously failed is the Zeppelin; it is a German invention. The Germans also introduced two things which anyone could have invented if he had been hard-hearted enough; liquid fire, and poison gas. We are matching them at these now. The Germans are far from being beaten yet; they are still very dangerous, and will give us many terrible surprises and blows. They think now they are the victors. **We are at a critical point of the war.** But they will be beaten if the boys from Kansas and Oregon and Georgia and Ohio and New York and Massachusetts, clean-cut and clean-lived and intelligent, keep at it.

Effort needed to beat Germany

And they will keep at it. Nothing has given Americans such a hearty sense of the intelligence and public spirit of our free citizens as the way they have responded to such an unusual measure as conscription and the draft. We have all realized that our nation cannot live on this earth if it can be insulted and wronged with impunity; that its liberty and rights for the future must be ensured; that mercy and truth, justice and peace, must be secured throughout the earth if civilization is to survive on it; that, as our great President says, the World must be made Safe for Democracy. We have all agreed with a prominent American apostle of peace that "the way out is forward." Our young men at the nation's call are postponing their plans for their lifework, and are risking their lives. They see that an entirely impartial draft is the fairest way of raising men to defend what we most value and love on earth; that **no man has a right to the blessings of this country, who will not rise to defend them when he is called.** America's young manhood can be relied on for courage and patriotism.

Response of our young men

And many of these are of German blood. The wickedness and treachery which have made the free nations resolved to down the Germans are not inborn traits of all their people. German-Americans are among the best citizens we have, as many of

To reform the Germans, not destroy them

them have shown during this war. We shall feel brotherly toward the German nation again if two things can be changed, their Government and their spirit.

Germany's present Government

The chief trouble with the Germans is their Government. It has the appearance of allowing power to the people, but this is only in appearance. As a fact, the Emperor has nearly absolute power. The ministers, or cabinet, are responsible only to him, do his will, and remain in office during his pleasure. The Reichstag, or Congress, is little more than a debating society; it talks but does not do things. If it refuses to vote taxes, the taxes of the preceding years are continued. Even the power to elect the members of this weak Reichstag is not equally in the hands of all citizens. The great cities, the home of the progressive working class, have the same representation as was given them in 1871, and therefore have far less voting-power relatively than country districts, which are controlled by the Junkers, the aristocrats and great land-owners. Prussia, which dominates Germany, is much less democratic than the Empire; the laboring class is almost powerless. All this means that a small group of selfish men can force the nation into war, as it did this time; and what is much worse, by feverish preparation and by poisoning the nation's mind can keep it ready and eager for war. Laboring people seldom want war, except for self-defense. There has always been a party in Germany that demanded more popular freedom. During the strain of the war this party has increased by leaps and bounds, so that the rulers are desperately afraid of it. By defeating the Government of Germany we shall help the real German people to get their rights. When all peoples have their rights, the World will be Safe for Democracy.

Germany's arrogance

The other danger from Germany lies in the belief of the Germans that they are a superior people with a civilization that must be forced on the rest of the world. This arrogance results from the position of the military nobility as a superior caste, and from Germany's youth and lack of political sense as a nation. Germany is the youngest of the great nations, only one-third as old as the United States. Their governing class believes that war is the noblest profession for an aristocrat to follow, that bayonets and not ballots should be put in the hands of the populace, and that their army is unconquerable. There is just one way to make such a people into a good member of the family of nations. We have joined in this task and we shall see it through.

Once again, Why is America fighting Germany?

Reason enough to fight Germany

(1) The German Government has drowned our citizens, sunk our ships, destroyed our property, insulted our flag, contrary to all law and all humanity. **Every such act was an act of war against us.**

(2) By its cruel and treacherous treatment of Belgium, and by its manner of waging war, it has excited the horror of all decent people. **Mercy and justice through all the world are at stake.**

(3) Its constant love and desire for war proves it the **greatest menace on earth to the peace and happiness of free peoples.**

(4) On our side are the **democracies of the world,** great and small; on the German side are the **autocracies of the world,** warring against the principles on which our democracy and all others are founded.

(5) Germany plans to dominate the Old World from its center, and to-day has largely accomplished the plan. **In a few years it will be too late to stop her.**

(6) Germany's ambitions for expansion in the New World have shown that **we should have to fight Germany later, if not now;** and without help, instead of with the help of all other great free peoples.

To fight Germany now is the only way to make the World Safe for Democracy; to make sure that little American babies, our little brothers and sons, shall not have to do it, but shall grow up free from the nightmare of militarism, suspicion and fear. America is a peaceable nation; **if we wish to remain so, we must win this war.** After this, will anyone ask, Why America fights Germany?

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Washington, D. C.

(Established by Order of the President, April 14, 1917)

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